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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: SCHOLARS OFFER VIEWS ON 2010 ELECTIONS  
AND THE WAY FORWARD (PART V OF V)

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 1357  
[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 1358  
[1](#)C. ADDIS ABABA 1359  
[1](#)D. ADDIS ABABA 1360  
[1](#)E. ADDIS ABABA 1111  
[1](#)F. ADDIS ABABA 1229

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

PART V OF V. THIS FIVE-PART CABLE DETAILS ETHIOPIAN  
SCHOLARS' VIEWS ON THE ETHIOPIAN POLITY.

Summary  
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[1](#)1. (S/NF) Parts I-IV of this series (refs A, B, C, D) outlined how, in the views of Ethiopian scholars, the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is consolidating de facto one-party rule, weakening state institutions, and creating conditions that risk Ethiopia's stability. Interviewed following the EPRDF's landslide victory in the April 2008 local elections (ref E), the Ethiopian scholars divided roughly into two camps: Pluralists, who favored participatory democracy, and Statists, who favored a dominant EPRDF. In this Part V, Pluralists and Statists offered their prescriptions on the way forward. While Pluralists were generally pessimistic about prospects for greater space for mainstream political opposition in the upcoming 2010 national elections, Statists held out hope that the EPRDF will reform internally. The Pluralists and Statists differed in their views on any potential United States response to Ethiopia's internal developments, with Statists arguing that the United States should stay out of Ethiopia's domestic politics and only urge the EPRDF to open the economy, and the Pluralists arguing that the United States should use its leverage to create necessary space for mainstream political opposition. This Part V further reviews the scholars views presented in Parts I-V. In light of the scholars' views and other Post reporting, the Ambassador has begun approaching the EPRDF at the highest levels and frankly express our concerns that the EPRDF's current actions may adversely affect our mutual interest in the Ethiopian state's long term viability. These discussions will encourage the TPLF-led Politburo to explain clearly how their consolidation of power enhances, rather than retards, the welfare and security of the Ethiopian state. End Summary.

The 2010 Elections and the Way Forward  
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¶2. (S/NF) Overall, the scholars were pessimistic that the EPRDF will open any political space for the 2010 elections. The Pluralists generally say they expect a repeat of the April 2008 elections. As one AAULAW faculty member put it, "The way forward is bleak. No change will occur by 2010. I can't answer what would shock the TPLF into changing course."

Several slightly more optimistic pluralists pin their hopes on an EPRDF "change of heart" that will permit the opposition incremental gains in Parliament. In the alternative, few Pluralists or Statists are willing to articulate creative ways forward, other than to call for broad national reconciliation. As one Pluralist think tank expert put it, "The only way forward is national reconciliation and making the institutions of the state work, but the problem is that every attempt at national reconciliation is rebuffed. Fortunately, in the historical struggle to keep Ethiopia together the forces of unity have prevailed. A government of national unity is the way out." The Statists, in turn, hold out for internal EPRDF reforms. In the words of the Statist think tank expert with TPLF ties, "The EPRDF must reform itself. The worst case scenario is that the ten percent economic growth does not translate into meaningful gains at the household level. Ethiopia's wealth disparity is increasing. People know elections won't change anything, but internal changes can be led by the civil service. Leadership must create an intelligent and effective state. If they don't, Ethiopia will collapse."

#### United States Role

¶3. (S/NF) Asked how they viewed the United States' and the international community' role with respect to the Ethiopian polity going forward, the Statists suggested that the United States use its influence to urge the EPRDF to open up economically, but stay out of Ethiopia's internal politics. The Statist think tank expert with TPLF ties said, "It is important for the United States to press the EPRDF to unlock Ethiopia's economic potential. It is not the United States' role to facilitate inter-party dialogue." The Pluralists took the opposite view and argued that the United States and other international "donors" have leverage with the Ethiopian government due to their massive assistance packages and should pressure the EPRDF to reverse course and move away from authoritarianism. One Pluralist think tank expert said, "The United States administration must weigh in, pressure Meles to negotiate with the rebels and allow all parties to participate in the political process. There will be no change without pressure on Meles. It is time to end rebel movements with negotiation." A Pluralist AAULAW faculty member added, "There is still room for Western influence that transcends fanciful tit-for-tat diplomacy. People think the United States in particular can bring change if it is willing to. The United States can tilt the balance of politics in Ethiopia."

#### Comment

¶4. (S/NF) The ten scholars' views, as expressed in this five-part series, are not inconsistent with concerns expressed by other Embassy contacts and, at the very least, represent common perceptions of elites and market makers in Ethiopia. Their descriptions of the Ethiopian polity are, however, at variance with the Ethiopian government's more sanguine representations to our Embassy (ref F). The scholars portrayed the EPRDF as an authoritarian regime in ascendancy following its decision to turn away, for now, from its brief experiment with multiparty democracy. Even as it expands its influence, the regime, in the scholars' view, evidences classic strains common to authoritarian regimes, including predictable economic blunders caused by an intrusive state, dilution of capacity in state institutions, the rise of rent-seeking behavior and the (intentional) erosion of trust between various societal groups. These problems, the scholars averred, are compounded by the unwieldy EPRDF coalition, run by an insular and tin-eared Politburo and its

proxies, that rules this diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society by crude coercion rather than consent. Though divided on whether Ethiopia can thrive as a de facto one-party state, the scholars agreed no other political party or advocacy group is at present positioned to succeed the EPRDF, given the EPRDF's singular control over the state security apparatus. However, all agreed that the EPRDF's current policies could ultimately destabilize the country.

¶15. (S/NF) Comment Continued: United States national security interests in Ethiopia's internal political dynamics are tied to the question of Ethiopia's fundamental stability. If Ethiopia were to fracture, the resulting chaos would engulf the entire Horn of Africa, producing an incalculable set back for regional stability and for our global efforts to counter extremism. It remains an open question whether any strong, single-party government in Addis Ababa can effectively administer a nation with as many fault lines (ethnic, linguistic and religious) as Ethiopia, but the message from this small sampling of scholars is that historically the answer in Ethiopia has been "no" and that the EPRDF has begun to draw unfavorable comparisons among elites to the Emperor and the Dergue regimes, both of which were toppled at gunpoint. As the EPRDF unabashedly extends its authority throughout the economy, civil society and society writ large, Post has begun approaching the EPRDF at the highest levels and frankly expressing our concerns that the EPRDF's current actions may adversely affect our mutual interest in the Ethiopian state's long term viability. We will encourage the TPLF-led Politburo to explain clearly how their consolidation of power enhances, rather than retards, the welfare and security of the Ethiopian state. On the basis of the Politburo's response, coupled with independent analysis of the efficacy of EPRDF actions, we will be best positioned to determine how to engage this regime in a manner that balances

our considerable need to continue our current counterterrorism efforts in the Horn of Africa unimpeded with our long term interests Ethiopia's and the region's stability. End Comment.

END PART V of V.  
YAMAMOTO